
Missions in the Context of Recovery from Childhood Sexual Abuse

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Although survivors of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) do not constitute a mission field in the geographical sense, current awareness of the impact of CSA provides data that allow Christians to reach out with compassion to that population. This paper connects studies on CSA with elements of trauma. It points out some of the factors needed for recovery from CSA to aid missionary awareness and includes an excursus on the concept of forgiveness as seen in the Gospels. Finally, it calls the church to provide communities that embody an effective mindset for mission outreach to this population.

Childhood Sexual Abuse as Trauma

Trauma “deals with shocks to the system, lacerations of the spirit, soul damage” (Everstine 1992:ix). Something is traumatic when it happens to us unexpectedly, when we are unprepared, and when we can not prevent it from happening (Flannery 1998:7). Variables that affect the impact of the event include its seriousness, its duration, the larger meaning attributed to the event, the person’s belief system and identity, the response of the family, the level of personal danger, shame and guilt, a sense of responsibility, and whether it was a personal attack. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a more long-term reaction to traumatic events, includes intrusive memories, avoidance or numbing behavior, ongoing arousal problems, self-destructive behavior. Common reactions include shock, denial, anger and depression.¹

Childhood Sexual Abuse (CSA), then, can be seen as a trauma inducing experience. Although clinical studies have not come up with a definitive list of symptoms, the studies that do exist show considerable overlap with this model. Kendall-Tackett, Williams and Finkelhor (1993:174, emphasis added), in their analysis of current studies, describe various theories of traumatization. For example:

Finkelhor and Browne’s (1985) model suggests that sexual abuse traumatizes children through four distinctive types of mechanisms, which account for the variety of

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outcomes The four mechanisms have been termed (a) *traumatic sexualization*, (b) *betrayal*, (c) *stigmatization*, and (d) *powerlessness* Traumatic sexualization includes a variety of processes such as the inappropriate conditioning of the child's sexual responsiveness and the socialization of the child into faulty beliefs and assumptions about sexual behavior Betrayal includes the *shattering of the child's confidence that trusted persons are interested in and capable of protecting him or her from harm* Stigmatization covers all the mechanisms that undermine the child's positive self-image the *shame* that is instilled, the ostracism the child suffers, and the negative stereotypes that are acquired from the culture and immediate environment Finally, powerlessness comprises PTSD-type mechanisms (intense *fear* of death or injury from an *uncontrollable event*) as well as the repeated frustration of not being able to stop or escape from the noxious experience or elicit help from others These mechanisms are present to varying degrees and in different forms in different abuse scenarios

This is only one model, of course, but it shows both the overlap with other traumas and the variables that affect the event's overall impact Kendall-Tackett, Williams, and Finkelhor (1993 175) summarize "The research to date points to an array of traumatizing factors in sexual abuse, with sexualization and PTSD as frequent, but not universal, processes" Thus, we see in survivors of CSA many of the effects of trauma (Although Finkelhor [1990 328-9] ultimately rejects PTSD as a framework under which sexual abuse can be "subsumed," he does recognize that "a significant fraction of sexual abuse victims suffer from PTSD-type symptoms" His concern is that "the PTSD conceptualization of sexual abuse appears too narrow" because victims' symptoms may include "sexualization," "trauma in the cognitive realm," "other problems" rather than "PTSD-type symptoms," and the abuse may not have happened "under conditions of danger, threat, and violence" These are important points, however, in this article PTSD is used as a beginning framework for discussion rather than an ultimate category)

Another study, this one by Leahy, Pretty, and Tenenbaum, compared symptoms of clinically distressed versus nonclinically distressed adult survivors of CSA They begin by pointing out that "[c]haracteristics of sexual abuse that have been associated with poorer outcomes include abuse perpetrated by a person in a position of trust" as well as "prior exposure to other traumatic events" (2003 657) This, too, correlates with the information on trauma given above The authors conclude

In this study, sexual abuse was reported as an experience of prolonged and repeated *fear, confusion, and entrapment* Not surprisingly, both groups in the proximal phase of the abuse attributed meaning to their experience by shifting the locus of control onto themselves However, it was only in the clinically distressed group that dissociation co-occurred with the locus-of-control shift The co-occurrence of these two processes is considered to be the primary driving force in the development of traumatic attachment to the perpetrator, which in turn is one of the core conflicts to be resolved in therapeutic work Difficulties with intimacy and trust, expected outcomes of traumatic attachment and subsequent betrayal, were clearly described by the clinically distressed group (2003 663, emphasis added)

Finally, Dr Eliana Gil, a licensed counselor who specializes in the treatment of abused children and adolescents as well as adult survivors, presents another list of symptoms of chronic abuse "developmental delays, impaired identities, feelings of

insecurity; inability to trust; internalized or externalized anger; and varying degrees of impairment in their abilities to form positive attachments, friendships, or rewarding intimate relationships” (1996:75).

Thus, the impact of CSA corresponds with the description of a trauma. Sexual abuse is not an expected event and children are certainly unprepared and powerless against it. PTSD frequently occurs, although the specifics (both its presence/absence, as well as its presentation) vary according to the individual. Survivors of CSA, then, need the kinds of missional outreach appropriate for people coming out of trauma.

Factors in Healing from CSA

This definition of healing, “not the absence of pain or memories, but the ability to go forward with hope and purpose, cultivating a vital relationship with God and investing in the lives of others” (Fancher 2007) fits the goal for recovery from CSA. Depending on the severity of the abuse as well as other factors mentioned above, survivors may always struggle with various triggers for old fears or memories. They usually experience healing as a spiral, with many levels. At every pass through the memories, new issues become evident which survivors must work through. Every circle deepens their relationship with God and brings them closer to wholeness. From the richness of that relationship, then, they begin to develop healthy relationships with others.

This kind of healing happens in a context similar to that required for survivors of other types of trauma. Their responses are similar, and so, also, are their needs. Ministry to them must include attention to those issues.

A Safe Place

Survivors of CSA need a safe place to experience acceptance. Survivors often feel shame about what has happened to them. This is true across many different cultures. McEvoy and Daniluk (1995:225) describe the “feelings of guilt and shame regarding the abuse” expressed by aboriginal women. Cole and Putman (1992:180), in the United States, note the “low self-esteem, shame, and interpersonal distress” reported even by “relatively disorder-free subjects.” Fontes (1993:30, 32) points out the correlation in Puerto Rico between “the high value placed on virginity at marriage,” “the general cultural taboos about discussing sexuality,” and victims’ reluctance to disclose abuse.

The Leahy, Pretty, and Tenenbaum study mentioned above notes that “appropriate social support has consistently been found to be one of the significant factors mediating the negative effects of sexual abuse,” although “social support networks may fail significantly on disclosure, resulting in increased distress” (2003:658). Especially if social support networks have failed the survivor in the past, the church has the opportunity to model better support. Without a caring community, survivors may turn to whoever is available. Gil, discussing adolescent survivors of abuse, says, “Often these youngsters find gang activity to provide valuable components of family life and feel accepted and cared for within gangs, regardless of whether the gang is or is not engaged in criminal activity” (1996:14).

The church, as the body of Christ, has the opportunity to offer a supportive community. First Corinthians 12:26 reminds us that “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it.” We can provide a safe environment where we allow people to discuss their pasts and communicate love and acceptance to them in the midst of their pain.

A Place to Express Emotion

CSA survivors also need a place to express emotion. They have often buried their feelings. The anger, fear, and pain that they felt may not have been safe to express as children, especially if the abuser was also their caretaker. They must receive support to work through those buried emotions. Sometimes, survivors of CSA cannot identify their feelings. We can give them patient encouragement to learn.

T. L. Cermak (1986:64–65), discussing clients suffering from other causes of PTSD, notes:

Those therapists who work successfully with this population have learned to honor the client's need to keep a lid on his or her feelings. The most effective therapeutic process involves swinging back and forth between uncovering feelings and covering them again, and it is precisely this ability to modulate their feelings that PTSD clients have lost. (They) must feel secure that their ability to close their emotions down will never be taken away from them, but instead will be honored as an important tool for living. The initial goal of therapy here is to help clients move more freely into their feelings with the assurance that they can find distance from them again if they begin to be overwhelmed. Once children from chemically dependent homes, adult children of alcoholics, and other PTSD clients become confident that you are not going to strip them of their survival mechanisms, they are more likely to allow their feelings to emerge, if only for a moment. And that moment will be a start.

God created us as emotional beings in reflection of himself (Deut. 6:14–15; Ps. 103:8). We can encourage those in our care with verses like Ex. 22:22–24 and Luke 17:1–2, which show that God, too, gets angry at injustice. Thus, in imaging him, we must learn appropriate expressions for even our most uncomfortable feelings.

A Place to Express Spiritual Doubts

Spiritual support is also critical for survivors of CSA. They have to deal with the reality that the world is not just and fair, that they can not always trust other people, that life is not safe, that the world is not orderly, and that they can often not control what happens to them. As survivors recognize the uniqueness of their experiences, they may conclude that they deserved what happened, that God is angry with them or has abandoned them. They may suppose that God either doesn't love them or has no power.

These questions can lead people to struggle with unbelief. *If God loves me, why did He allow this to happen?* Even faithful church-goers may suddenly experience a crisis of faith due to issues stemming from CSA. They may feel isolated, unable to trust the community around them. But as they work through these issues they may find that they connect with God in a deeper way.

In helping, we must provide a safe place for people to say these doubts out loud. In contrast, Dr. Peter Horsfield (2002:58), who worked in the area of clergy professional misconduct at the United Faculty of Theology in Melbourne, Australia from 1987–1996, describes church members who:

often put pressure on victims of assault to 'forgive and forget' quickly because the assault makes them feel uneasy, they don't want to keep hearing about things that are unpleasant (once survivors of abuse and injustice begin talking, they can often

want to talk about it a lot) and they find it difficult to handle the demanding emotional responses and the hard practical and faith questions those who have been assaulted begin to ask.

People processing such trauma, however, need our support, not an environment that shuts them down with either rejection of their questions or pat answers. Remaining comfortable with their discomfort and normalizing their questions helps to create a place for them to work towards resolution. Nicodemus (John 3:1–21) and the Berean Christians (Acts 17:11) provide biblical examples of people who wrestled with sincere questions. This kind of wrestling often ultimately produces deeper faith.

A Truth-telling Place

The feedback of others can also promote healing from CSA. A listener's reaction, when expressed judiciously and in moderation, helps an individual reframe the past. Many children create a context for the abuse, in which they blame themselves or deny the severity of the episodes. This allows them to go on functioning in an unsafe environment. In healing, however, they must go back and look at the past in the light of the present understandings.

In helping survivors through this process, missionary personnel will have to take cultural differences into consideration, without imposing American child-rearing practices or invalidating the perceptions of the survivor. Meston, Heiman, Trapnell, and Carlin (1999:143) compared the self-reporting of abuse between those of European and Asian ancestry. Their "findings suggest that even though acts of harsh discipline may be accepted within the bounds of proper parenting styles among Asians, offspring still perceive and experience them as abusive acts." They conclude that "from an emic perspective, our findings highlight the importance of considering not only what is normal or acceptable within a culture, but also how members of a culture subjectively perceive the experience." That study included all forms of abuse, but even sexual abuse may be variously viewed by different cultures. De Zoysa (2002:99) notes that in Sri Lanka, "it seems that even at the turn of the twentieth century, some professionals will make public statements justifying the sexual abuse of children on the grounds that it has taken place in the past or because it has been known to occur in religious settings."

This process of recovery, then, will include a reframing of previous understandings of one's past. It may involve a painful recognition of the failures of parents or guardians. New feelings of anger as well as grief may appear as regressions. These are important steps to healing, however. The feedback of others can help them move through this process and begin to see their past in a more balanced, truthful way.

A Place to Find Identity

Ultimately, survivors of CSA have to construct a new identity for themselves. How much better if they can adopt Christ's vision of them! They may have seen themselves as helpless,² deserving rejection, existing to serve others' needs, invisible and unimportant, without feelings worth considering. Instead, we can begin to show them that they are completely accepted, totally secure, and deeply significant.³

In cross-cultural ministry, survivors must integrate their own personal story with their cultural and spiritual identities McEvoy and Daniluk (1995 231) note, for example, that “most Canadian aboriginal tribes place high value on the extended family and on community mindedness” This means that “the aboriginal survivor of sexual abuse must reconcile the importance of this value in native culture with the reality of her experiences of victimization at the hands of family members” She will need to examine elements of her life story, her culture, and Biblical insights in a process of sorting, discarding and reframing

We must recognize, however, that this process takes time The reconstruction of a new identity cannot happen overnight We must remain patient and steadfast in prayer Only as survivors find consistent love, acceptance, and truth will they begin to relearn to trust

A Place to Give and Receive Forgiveness

The survivor may have learned a faulty definition of forgiveness Mary Williams (1991 114–5), a CSA survivor, gives an example from her own life

My mother thought she was being a good Christian when she turned the other cheek and lived a very passive life She lived her life so passively that she permitted her husband to kill my cats and to rape me She always taught me to forgive, no matter what people did to me The truth is my mother had little self-worth She never felt herself worthy enough to say, “You cannot do this to me nor can you do this to my daughter”

Too often, however, we present this issue as the first step in healing Horsfield (2002 54–5) points out the faulty “expectation that a woman who has been sexually assaulted should be able simply to decide by an act of conscious choice to forget she has been assaulted and carry on her life as if nothing has happened” Further, those who see forgiveness as “an effective tool for setting a victim of sexual abuse on the road to recovery” may pressure women “to forgive their assaulter as a solution to their problems long before they are ready and generally long before the wrong that has been done to them has been acknowledged and addressed”

Although survivors will each have their own timetables, they will probably approach forgiveness last Dr Charles Whitfield, Medical Director of The Resource Group Counseling Center (1987 113, emphasis in original), summarizes the process this way

- 1 Become *aware* of our upset or concern,
- 2 *Experience* it, including telling our story about it,
- 3 Consider the *possibility* that we may have a choice to stop suffering over it, and then
- 4 *Let go* of it

Each step is important We cannot rush the journey In steps 1 and 2, for example, survivors must begin to recognize that real sins were committed against them Survivors of CSA often take on a large share of guilt for the past They can not receive forgiveness for sins they did not commit Only in the process of coming to a better understanding of the roles of the different people in their stories can they begin to assign responsibility correctly They may need to hear, “It’s not your fault,” but they

may also need to understand why it is not. As they receive support through this process, they begin to feel appropriate anger and grief with each new moment of clarity. Only once this happens can they think about true forgiveness — letting go of the need for the payment that justice would demand.

Excursus: An Analysis of Forgiveness in the Gospels

The church today often teaches a forgiveness that differs from the forgiveness commanded by Jesus. Sometimes we connect forgiveness with reconciliation. Sometimes we emphasize forgiveness to the point of suggesting a denial of the truth. These teachings encourage people to keep secrets and wear masks. They discourage honest dialogue and true repentance, reconciliation, and growth.

Author Pre-understandings

Growing up in a family with abuse and dysfunction taught me to hide pain and say nothing. Keeping up the “happy family” fiction was our highest priority. Forgiveness meant going on as if abuse didn’t happen.

Sadly, after I became a Christian at 17, the church didn’t teach me differently. God provided one or two women to walk me through several years of healing. Most people, however, told me I should just “forgive and forget.”

Preachers quoted Bible passages to show support for that same understanding of forgiveness. They mentioned not only verses like Mark 11:25 (discussed below), but also Hebrews 8:12, where God promises to “remember [our] sins no more” and Psalm 103:12, where God removes our sins “as far as the east is from the west.” They held those up as models for forgiveness. This teaching solidified what I had learned as a child: when someone sins against you, a good Christian bears the pain (like Jesus did at his crucifixion) and continues to act lovingly towards the sinner.

Others have also heard this message from the church. Fortune and Marshall (2002:3) agree that “[t]oo often well-meaning friends, family and faith communities have urged individuals to ‘forgive and forget’ (Shakespeare’s *King Lear*) as a panacea which frees the rest of us from sharing the burden of harm that the individual bears. It never works and only serves to isolate the victim even further.” The church must learn that remembering is the first step towards forgiving.

In addition, the church often uncritically promotes the ideal of reconciliation as an integral part of forgiveness. They come to this conclusion based on the fact that God’s forgiveness for us results in our reconciliation with him. In addition, he calls us to be reconciled to each other (Matt. 5:24). Thus, people terribly mistreated and yet living in harmony with the perpetrators become examples for the congregation. Listening to such teaching encourages audience members to continue carrying the pain necessary to maintain abusive relationships, despite the guilt of smoldering resentment. Walking through healing means rejecting this conclusion.

Jesus’ Actions

Jesus certainly experienced opposition during his ministry on earth. The scribes and Pharisees, especially, said offensive and combative things to him. Sometimes, the crowds laughed at him. Instead of retreating, pouting, or avoiding his opponents, however, Jesus responded in one of three ways.

Sometimes, Jesus used the scribes and Pharisees' questions as an **opportunity for teaching**. Matthew 9 illustrates this especially well. When Jesus told the paralytic that his sins were forgiven, the teachers of the law completely misunderstood his motives, mostly because they had no understanding of his identity. Jesus responded by speaking the truth about them boldly.⁴

The Pharisees, in the same chapter, also confronted Jesus. Again, their question, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" showed that they didn't understand him or his actions. Jesus responded with an explanation that challenged the Pharisees to think in a new way. Jesus may have meant his words for his opponents or the crowd listening. Either way, he used opposition as an opportunity to teach the truth.

Jesus also answered opposition by simply **walking away**. In Luke 4:14–30, after speaking the truth to the crowd in Nazareth, they wanted to throw him off a cliff. In that instance, Jesus did not allow them to hurt him. He moved through the crowd and disappeared.

Opposition never kept Jesus from **focusing on his call**, however. In Mark 5:40, when he discussed healing Jairus' daughter and the crowds laughed at him, he put them out of the house. He knew what he intended to do, and he did not let opposition stop him.

Jesus' determination shows especially clearly in his journey to the cross. The Gospels show us Jesus repeatedly explaining his purpose to his disciples. He knew that dying on the cross was his ultimate goal. When Peter (Matt. 16:22–23) tried to dissuade him from that path, Jesus rebuked him sternly. On the other hand, Jesus did not rebuke all those who opposed him. His determination to fulfill his mission on earth led him to remain silent during his trial and crucifixion.⁵ He did not explain himself, nor respond to charges, nor try to teach either his opponents or those listening. He focused completely on his purpose which at that moment included enduring abuse.

Sometimes, then, Jesus used opposition as an opportunity to teach. That teaching could take the form of explanation or rebuke. Jesus also knew that sometimes the best response to opposition is just to walk away. At all times, however, Jesus kept his focus on his mission. He chose the course of action that would allow him to do that which God had called him to do.

We must note here that Jesus always responded in love. His love for the scribes and the Pharisees led him to speak the truth to them, giving them repeated chances to hear the truth and repent. However, his love did not spill over into idolatry. His obedience to God always came first.⁶

Jesus' Words

Jesus clearly taught us to forgive those who oppose us. So how does his teaching match his actions? How does forgiveness fit with Jesus' commitment to truth and obedience to God?

The New Testament writers usually use ἀφίημι and ἄφεσις for "forgive" or "forgiveness."⁷ The verb ἀφίημι⁸ occurs frequently in the Gospels and carries a variety of meanings. In 33 of 115 uses, it means "to forgive." Slightly more than half the time, God does the forgiving. Twelve times, however, the verb ἀφίημι refers to the forgiveness that one person offers to another. This study focuses on those passages.

In English, the words “forgiveness” and “reconciliation” are often conflated, but the range of meanings for ἀφίημι precludes that in Greek. Although one cannot read all the meanings of a word into every usage, the semantic range does contribute to a word’s connotations. This word, when used to mean “forgive,” focuses exclusively on the act of releasing the offender from the payment justice demands for her offense. It cannot include the idea of reconciliation.

This understanding of the word forgiveness helps in an analysis of the 12 passages in the Gospels that discuss forgiveness between people. These specific verses are quoted in the table on the following page⁹ and are arranged into thematic units.

The verses in Matthew 6 (and related verses in Mark and Luke) teach that our forgiveness from God depends on our forgiveness of others. That certainly makes forgiveness imperative for us. As seen in the meaning of the word, we may not continue to hold on to our need for justice or revenge. We must rest in the provision that God has made for sin — Jesus’ death on the cross.

That differs greatly, however, from acting as though we were not sinned against. The fact that God’s provision for sin cost so much highlights its enormity. We short-circuit the process of forgiveness when we try to “forgive and forget” before we have even realized that we have been hurt. Forgiveness implies that a sin has been committed. We must take that seriously. When we are sinned against, we have a right to demand justice — repayment for the stolen honor, joy, and love. God, however, covered the cost in himself.

The verses in Matthew 18 teach a process for working through forgiveness. We must see them in the context of the whole passage, however. Verses 15–20 detail the steps to take when others sin against us. They look very much like the actions we saw Jesus taking in his life.

Jesus asks us first to speak the truth directly to the person in question. This takes radical courage.¹⁰ Then, if he does not listen, we go again with one or two others. Next we talk to the church. Finally, we treat the offender as a pagan and a tax collector.¹¹

This passage immediately precedes the parable of the unmerciful servant with the references to forgiveness quoted above. The story, then, relates to the process Jesus outlined. Jesus tells it in response to Peter’s question: “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive?” In his earlier explanation, Jesus told us what to do if you go to your friend, speak the truth, and the fault is not acknowledged. In the parable, since here the servant recognizes his debt and asks for mercy, Jesus is showing us what to do if the fault is acknowledged. Forgiveness for the truly repentant should include some sort of reconciliation. Forgiveness for the unrepentant may not.

Matthew 7, part of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, also speaks to this issue of forgiveness. Jesus tells us to take the plank out of our own eye before trying to get a speck out of our neighbor’s. Yet in the very next verse, he warns us not to give dogs what is sacred. Ten verses later, he teaches us to know a tree by its fruit. We must interpret these passages in light of each other, rather than in isolation.

As we think about people who have offended us to whom we might speak a word of truth, we must not to get “squint-eyed” about it. No one needs a constant critic. Living in Christian community means daily grace for each other.¹²

<p>Matt 6:12 “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”</p>	<p>Luke 11:4 “And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.”</p>
<p>Matt 6:14–15 “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”</p>	<p>Mark 11:25 “Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.”</p>
<p>Matthew 18:21 Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?”</p>	<p>Luke 17:3–4 “Be on your guard! If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive. And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive.”</p>
<p>Matthew 18:27 “And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt.”</p>	
<p>Matthew 18:32 “Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.’”</p>	
<p>Matthew 18:35 “So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”</p>	
<p>Luke 23:34 Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots to divide his clothing.</p>	
<p>John 20:23 “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.</p>	

Table: Forgiveness verses organized thematically

Ultimately, however, we must act in love, even for those we might consider our enemies (Matt. 5:43–48). We have to evaluate each situation, asking ourselves some hard questions. Have I spoken the truth as well as I understand it? Do I care about the soul of the other person? Is God calling for further discussion in order to confront sin and encourage growth? Is God calling me to move into other areas of ministry, always praying for this person and letting go of resentment and the need for justice, but also allowing God to direct my role in this person's life? Our decisions should flow from God's leading in these areas.¹³

Conclusion

Jesus' actions and words teach a forgiveness that exists in tension with his proclamation of truth. The church has often focused on the first and ignored the second. We must no longer make that mistake.

Although we do not see the truth as clearly as Jesus did, we can still speak into difficult situations. We must do so with humility, but the church must no longer confuse Christian love with the absence of conflict. We must continue to encourage each other to let go of a righteous demand for justice from those who refuse to recognize their trespasses as well as from those who ask for forgiveness. Yet we must balance our traditional gentleness with a willingness to speak out on behalf of the weak, the poor, and the abused. In other words, we must fear God more than we fear man.

The Model

The church community can act as an agent of truth in the midst of the lies that the victim has absorbed. James Evinger, a clinical researcher at the University of Rochester Medical Center, and Dorthea Yoder (2002:84), an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church (USA), affirm that

forgiveness requires that the truth be told. Truth identifies who was hurt, what harms were inflicted, who caused the hurt and how it happened. To tell the truth about the offender forces an assessment of culpability and holds that person accountable. The act of telling the truth about culpability is a catalyst for the community to examine its responsibility and complicity. Telling the truth about the harms is a way to alert, educate and help prevent new victimization. To tell the truth about the victims requires identifying ways the community can act to make for healing, offer restitution, promote restoration of those injured and work for justice.

By speaking the truth in this way, we uphold justice and communicate powerfully to survivors of CSA the love of the community, the seriousness of the offense, and their worth before God.¹⁴

Notes

1. A full definition of PTSD can be found in American Psychiatric Association. 2000. *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-IV-TR*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association.

2. "No matter what they do or say, they cannot stop the abuse from happening, since they do not have personal power or control. They may therefore think of themselves as vulnerable and helpless, since they are unable to effect necessary changes" (Gil 1996:70).

3 My Identity in Christ compiled from Neil T Anderson, *Victory Over the Darkness Realizing the Power of Your Identity in Christ* (Ventura, CA Regal Books, 1990)

4 Jesus' complex purposes go beyond the focus of this paper Grant Osborne (1991 238), discussing Jesus' parables, says, "Jesus often used parables not from a desire to communicate truth but to hide the truth from unresponsive hearers Parables confirmed unbelievers in their rejection "

5 The trial and resurrection narratives are found in Matt 26 47–27 50, Mark 14 43–15 37, Luke 22 47–23 46, John 18–19

6 In teaching this to my adult Sunday school class, someone pointed out that Jesus was not afraid As we discussed it further, we realized that Jesus feared God (in the OT sense) more than all the things we tend to fear when we meet opposition loss of relationships, confrontations, emotional or even physical pain We succumb to idolatry when we fear those things more than God

7 They also use *χαριζομαι*, but only in Colossians and 2 Corinthians

8 The noun *αφεσις* occurs almost exclusively (11 times) in the phrase *αφεσις αμαρτων* (forgiveness of sins) The other occurrences are Mark 3 29, Eph 1 7, Heb 9 22 and 10 18 In all four of these places, the word nevertheless carries the idea of forgiveness of sins, the word "sin" (or, in the case of Ephesians, a synonym) occurring either in the rest of the verse or in the broader passage

9 All biblical citations in this paper are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version* of the Bible

10 Confrontation, of course, should only take place after any safety concerns have been addressed and necessary measures implemented

11 What, exactly, Jesus meant by this is debated On the one hand, Jesus' hearers would not have associated with them On the other hand, pagans (or at least sinners) and tax collectors were the very people with whom Jesus spent the most time A middle ground explanation would be that you begin to see them as mission fields — people who need your love and truth, but whom you will no longer trust yourself to as you would to your fellow believers

12 The importance of this passage does not parallel the attention I can give it in a paper focused on forgiving the sins of others We must always examine ourselves for our own sinful contributions to the conflicts we experience, apologize quickly, and make restitution when possible

13 The final two verses in the chart are much harder to understand and apply They remind me, however, that sin always has a cost We suffer when others sin Sometimes, our response might parallel Jesus' in Luke 23 34 Sometimes God does call us to bear pain, knowing that the other person's sin was not intentional, or knowing that our long-term goals are more important than the pain we feel John 20 23, however, reminds me that we do have the choice Bearing the pain of others' sin in silence is not the only Christian response That kind of suffering must come from a determined focus on some greater good

14 In addition, see Carolyn Holderreard Heegen (1996 26 27) " a facile, quick forgiveness that doesn't appropriately hold the perpetrator of abuse responsible for his behavior not only puts others in danger of his ongoing violence, it likewise decreases the likelihood that he will honestly face his sinful behavior, repent, and get the help he needs to understand and change his destructive patterns of behavior Pushing for quick forgiveness and cheap mercy not only trivializes the victim's depth of pain and woundedness, but may also rob the perpetrator of the opportunity to experience true repentance and redemption "

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